

THE MARRIAGE OF ART AND SCIENCE

Los Angeles / Laurie Garris

Robert Bassler's tetrahedral sculptures and painted wall reliefs at Wenger Gallery invoke an idealistic image of man as explorer—stretching the limits of ideology and digging ever deeper the furrows of science and art. Bassler is not a scientist, yet he approaches his art with the restlessness of an experimentalist who seeks to understand and explain the arrangement of nature's order and disorder, illustrating the phenomena in a form that fuses art and science into a single, ordered whole.

Recently, mathematical science has begun to explore a system of geometry that encompasses forms in nature which cannot be explained in Euclidean terms. This fractal system, as it is known, has allowed scientists to investigate the morphology of the amorphous. Bassler's artistic explorations merged with this system by chance, developing from a penetrating desire to reach the essence of existence and awareness. The explanations emerged and jelled as the work germinated, and what has resulted is a series of pieces that encourages the viewer to wonder, question and contemplate.

Bassler constructs pieces whose format is based on repetitions of the tetrahedron, one of the most ordered and perfect geo-

metric volumes known to humankind, and some would argue that its equilateral dimensions suggest an autonomously existent, self-contained energy and power.

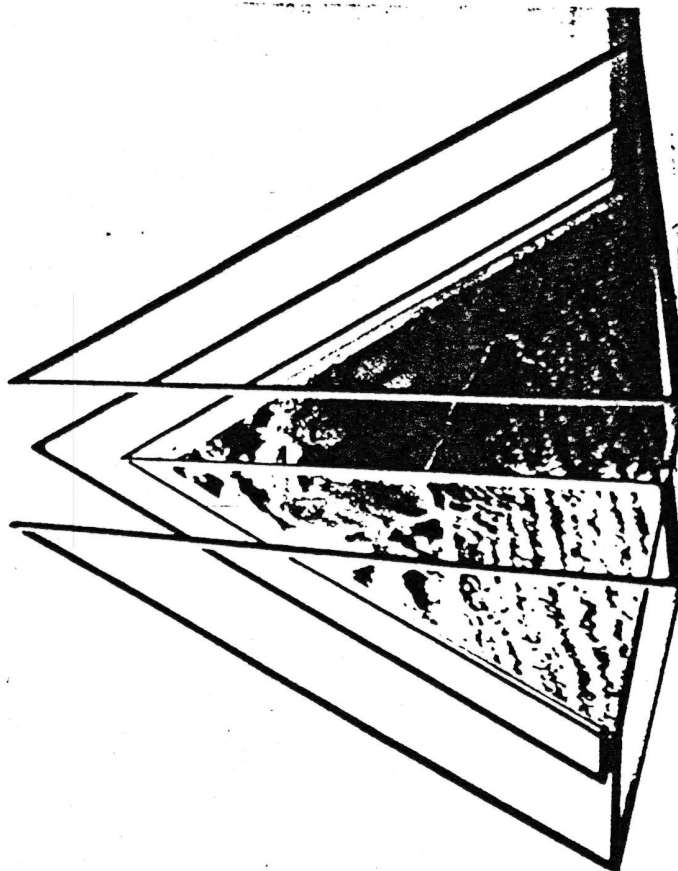
Bassler mixes this fractal logic with realistically painted depictions of geologic transformations on the pyramidal surfaces of the works. These events—turbulent

cloud risings, battered shorelines and eroding land masses—confound and challenge the ordered constraints of the form itself. Four large wall reliefs provide the purest examples of this confrontation. *Gathered Forces—hurricane clouds*, for instance, depicts the tempestuous swirling energy of a mounting storm. *Offshore Typhoon—Schouten Island, South Pacific* distances the viewer from a raging event that is mildly perceived as white-ringed shorelines with puffy cumuli overhead.

Five freestanding painted sculptures, called *Tetrahedrons*, are fitted with etched plexiglass encasements, referring to the cloud strata that hover as a protective skin over the globe. Linear steel frames echoing the tetrahedral format imply armor imposed on an earth whose fragility is often ignored. Taken from space photography, Bassler's painted images depict the collision of elements and the energy transfers that arise as a result.

Bassler's elaboration on the tenet that fractal objects are "self-similar" is most faithfully expressed in his welded steel piece, *Infinite Fractal Pyramid*. Zero and infinity are the two poles in nature's fractal system. In this piece, the tetrahedral apex establishes point zero; from there the same

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Robert Bassler, *TETRAHEDRON—Atlantic Coast, Georgia*, 1987, acrylic on hardboard, plexiglass and steel, 15-1/2" x 23" x 20", at Wenger Gallery, Los Angeles.